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THE LATIN PLAY RECENTLY GIVEN IN THE WESTERN HIGH SCHOOL, DETROIT¹

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When the new edition of Professor F. J. Miller's dramatization from Virgil, *Dido, the Phœnician Queen*, was published, the Latin teachers of the Western High School resolved to present it. Mr. Miller has worked over parts from the first and fourth books of the Aeneid. While following the original closely, he has adapted it very ingeniously. Much of the "business" (to use a stage term) nevertheless is left to be worked out by those who undertake the play.

The play was given February 22 in our school auditorium, and was repeated the next week. All of the scenery was painted by Miss Willoughby, instructor in Latin and drawing, with the aid of one of her advanced pupils. The costumes and stage properties, such as spears, shields, lamps, and musical instruments, were made under the direction of the Latin teachers.

The drama is in four acts, of three scenes each. The Prelude, commencing with the familiar words *Arma virumque cano*, was sung before the curtain by a chorus dressed in white, and produced a wierd effect.

On the raising of the curtain an open square on the Acropolis before the Temple of Juno in the new city of Carthage is disclosed. Water carriers and workmen pass by and drop incense on the altar, then a chorus of maidens dressed in light green enter and sing a hymn to the dawn. As they disappear, Aeneas and *fidus* Achates, who have started out to explore the unknown land, enter and are soon accosted by Venus disguised as a huntress. In answer to his inquiries she tells Aeneas that he has reached the land of Africa, and relates the story of Dido's flight from

¹ Presented at the Classical Conference at Ann Arbor, Michigan, April 2, with 21 stereopticon illustrations from slides prepared by Principal W. A. Morse.

Tyre. As she bids him farewell and vanishes, he recognizes too late that it is his goddess mother.

Soon Dido's train enters. Scarcely has the queen taken her place to administer justice when cries are heard in the distance and a band of Trojans is halted by the guards. Their chief, Ilioneus, having by permission addressed the queen, is promised protection; the queen, moreover, promises to send in search of the lost Aeneas. At this point the hero, who has remained in concealment, discloses himself, to the amazement of Dido and the great joy of the Trojans.

The next scene shows Venus and Cupid in a forest. Calling Cupid to her side, the goddess instructs him to assume the form of Ascanius and inspire Dido with love for Aeneas. Delighted to work mischief, he struts off on his errand.

The third and perhaps the most effective scene, the banquet, is in Dido's palace. Only one table is shown on the stage, but the noise and laughter in the distance show that others likewise are feasting.

Act II opens with a scene in the queen's chamber where the shrine containing the bust of her former husband Sychaeus with lighted censer before it is seen. After struggling against the new love she finally, on the advice of her sister Anna, yields and assumes the brilliant garments laid aside during her widowhood.

In the second scene we see the Idalian grove. Juno in a rage comes upon Venus with the kidnaped Ascanius at her feet and proposes a peaceful settlement of affairs, to which Venus with a sarcastic smile assents.

Next we behold Iarbas, the Moorish prince, one of Dido's many rejected suitors, in the temple of Jupiter Ammon upbraiding his god because he has allowed Aeneas instead of one of his own worshipers to gain the victory.

Months have passed since Act II and we are again in the open square on the Acropolis. In the background groups of people are passing to and fro and in front Aeneas is busily engaged in helping build the citadels of Carthage; Mercury appears and warns him not to suffer his glorious destiny thus to be ignominiously thwarted. Now, all alert to leave the land, the king

orders the boats to be prepared; he is overheard by Dido, who has meanwhile entered, and is bitterly reproached for his design and entreated to stay; but in vain.

The three scenes of Act IV are in Dido's palace. After weighing various plans she decides on her own death. Hearing the songs of the sailors rejoicing at their departure for Italy, she calls down the sevenfold curse on Aeneas, plunges her sword to her heart, and falls.

The mysterious maidens of the Prelude again appear singing,

Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem.
Sic volvere Parcas.

All the parts save that of Dido (taken by one of the teachers) were assigned to students. They entered into the undertaking with enthusiasm and did the hard work of memorizing and rehearsing without complaint. The audiences both evenings were large and appreciative. Of course all such work is difficult and distracting, as well for the teacher as for the pupil; yet it is clear to us that the giving of the play was well worth while because it stimulated a fresh and more intelligent interest in all our Latin work.